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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8695/02

Composition

General comments

Most Centres are now preparing candidates with a very clear and close focus on the demands of this paper. However, some Centres may wish to consider whether there are more strategies they could put in place, for example, a focus on particular genres might help some candidates and a stress on the use of appropriate formats (such as the layout of a drama script) might help others avoid some of the rubric infringement which occurred on **Question 2** in this session. It may also help some candidates to plan their work before they begin writing: on some occasions, answers at the lower end of the range showed little forethought or preparation. In general, though, candidates continue to produce some thoughtful and perceptive work which is enjoyable to read.

It would also be useful if some Centres could ensure certain basic procedures are followed by candidates: that questions are clearly numbered; that each sheet carries the candidate's name and that all sheets are securely fastened together. Quite a number of such basic procedures were not followed this session. A further issue to stress to candidates is the length of composition required by the rubric: 600 to 900 words. A small minority of candidates are not doing themselves full justice by writing less than the required amount, a self-penalising process.

Candidates should also be reminded for the need for technical accuracy: the most recurrent errors seem to include confusion of past and present tenses and agreement between singular and plurals.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

The general concept of this type of question – contrasted description – is fairly standard and candidates, in general, approach it skilfully and thoughtfully. There were some excellent responses. Less secure answers tended to either offer a rather factual approach or, at the other extreme, rather over-poetic material bordering on the excessive use of language for effect. There was some effective use of contrasting settings and ways of life. Candidates need to ensure that each section of their composition reaches the required rubric length.

Question 2

There was some serious misreading of the question here by some candidates. The question clearly asks for a drama script, a format which is fairly well established for this paper. Instead, some preferred to offer short stories and completely missed the focus of the title. Some attempted a drama script but did not seem familiar with the conventions of the format: for example, the placing of stage directions in brackets and the use of the present tense in such stage directions. Successful answers did present some effective material with some evidence of a twist or unexpected denouement.

Question 3

Effective answers showed a strong sense of structure and grasped the purpose of the task well. There was a pleasing blend of description combined with a sense of personal reflection and honesty. Some answers began with one particular smell or taste and widened the focus: others concentrated on one particular experience and based their response on a narrative around it.

Question 4

Less secure answers here tended to centre on boy meets girl to the point that ideas of the 'unusual' or 'eccentric' became lost. This approach also meant a slight reliance on caricature rather than on detailed characterisation. Effective answers, however, relied on the development of characterisation and context in thoughtful and perceptive ways and engineered the final meeting of the characters in unusual and entertaining formats.

Section B**Question 5**

There was evidence of informed and up-to-date preparation about contemporary media and technology, as well as some of the underlying problems and complexities concerning their rapid development – issues such as economic considerations and social implications. Where this awareness was turned to the issue of privacy, there were some highly perceptive and thoughtful responses characterised by a subtle blend of argument and examples. This was also a popular choice and demonstrated that prepared strategies can give candidates confidence and a clear sense of purpose and audience.

Question 6

Here, too, there were some sensible and proficient responses reinforced by a clear sense of format, purpose and audience. Candidates selected relevant material and argued their cases well on the whole. There was an appropriate sense of address and register; the occasional response relied on a hectoring approach but this was an answer, on the whole, that candidates seemed well prepared for.

Question 7

Most responses here were thoughtful and reflective, managing to combine a clear line of argument with personal anecdotes, personal experiences and observations on current global and social events. Candidates sometimes approached the question from a religious and philosophical angle, weighing up approaches with insight and depth. Less secure answers tended to rely on a biographical approach, holding up role models as evidence of proof of either side of the argument. This tended to create a slightly impersonal tone to the material.

Question 8

This was generally well chosen by candidates who displayed a solid and informed grasp of audiences and apt rhetorical devices. Some of these techniques were applied very persuasively; in fact, some were so successful they persuaded the reader of both sides of the argument. There was a pleasing ability to draw out and highlight contrasts between the defence and the prosecution.

Paper 8695/09

Poetry, Prose and Drama

General comments

A large cohort of candidates entered the examination this session, the majority showing thorough knowledge of their texts, often accompanied by engagement and enjoyment. Many Centres are clearly preparing their candidates very well, shown in their detailed knowledge of texts and often a good contextual knowledge as well. Those candidates who were able to select from their contextual knowledge, and use it precisely to inform their answers to the questions, wrote thoughtful and often sophisticated answers.

From such a large candidature, the majority wrote on Keats' poetry and Ngugi's: *A Grain of Wheat*. These two texts overwhelmed the others by some margin, but *Touched with Fire*, *North and South* and the short stories of Katherine Mansfield were also well represented. Paper 9 Drama answers were quite equally divided between *Macbeth* and *The Glass Menagerie*. There were very few answers on *Serious Money*.

While candidates' confidence in dealing with texts and questions seems to have improved over the years, the issues which divide the successful candidates from those who are less successful remain clear. Successful candidates select carefully from their knowledge to answer the question set, specifically and directly. They support points with reference and quotation, and write about the authors and their techniques rather than characters and plot. Those who are less successful use their knowledge and learning without selectivity, approach answers from a narrative position and use contextual knowledge in the place of textual knowledge. In the passage-based questions, successful candidates analyse the language and form of the extract on the paper in considerable detail.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**John Keats: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This was a very popular question and elicited very varied responses. At the top end of the mark range, candidates used the two quotations in the question to give a lead into appropriate poems and focused specifically on these choices. Usually they were contrasting choices, to indicate the range in Keats' verse, and they examined the language and form in which the views of human life are expressed. Often clear links were made to circumstances in Keats' own life which led him to consider the contrasting elements in human life as a whole. 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode on Melancholy' were frequent and successful choices. In June, a number of candidates seemed to struggle with the narrative verse, so it was surprising that many candidates chose to focus on narrative verse for this question. While 'The Eve of St Agnes' in particular often worked well, many candidates who chose narrative poems struggled to make their choices relevant to the question and relied on paraphrase combined with Keats' biography. 'Negative capability' cropped up in many answers, but often without understanding, while 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' was quoted by very many candidates, but most often without clear relevance to the question.
- (b) Most candidates who attempted this question seemed confident in their knowledge of the poem, and those who paid attention to the question's requirement for attention to language and form were the more successful. The key part of this answer was to link the language and form to the development of the poem's ideas, so those candidates who matched technical knowledge with an overarching understanding of the whole poem did very well. In some cases, candidates relied on identification of poetic devices, with little evidence of an understanding of the poem. This lack of comprehension was apparent in a number of answers which demonstrated that candidates had not understood the progression of seasons in a temperate climate, which led to misunderstanding of what Autumn is and represents.

Question 2*Touched with Fire*: ed. Hydes

- (a) This was the less popular of the two options, but many candidates selected appropriate poems and wrote well about poets' treatment of the past, memory, or both. 'Ozymandias', 'Cold in the Earth', 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'The Early Purges', for example, were all widely-chosen poems. Candidates who choose the open essay question on the anthology tend to be quite confident in their ability to choose appropriate poems and recall them with some accuracy, resulting in fewer answers which are reliant on summary and paraphrase.
- (b) There were very many answers on 'Musee des Beaux Arts', which varied widely in quality. Many candidates seemed to be approaching the poem as an unseen text, rather than one they had prepared, and as some of its ideas are quite complex, a number of these candidates struggled. Candidates who were familiar with the central concepts of art galleries, 'Old Masters' and the Icarus myth had the basis for a successful answer. Some candidates appreciated the subtleties of Auden's casually irregular lines, unassertive rhymes and apparent untidiness as the poem's form imitates a wandering musing on paintings in a gallery. Others were very sensitive to particular images which Auden describes in the paintings, such as 'doggy life', the 'torturer's horse(s)... innocent behind' and 'the expensive delicate ship'.

Question 3Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The majority of candidates on Smith chose this question and most made a reasonable attempt to interpret the poem, although there was a tendency to treat it at a very literal level. This meant seeing it as being about the life of one specific man, rather than the human condition in general. As a result, some candidates struggled to deal with lines such as 'I ran wild for centuries'. The most successful answers referred to religious imagery and the three stages reflected in the poem's structure. A number of candidates were unaware of the sex of Stevie Smith, which was surprising.

Question 4Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) There were many good answers on *North and South*, and many candidates felt confident with their contribution which Bessy makes to the novel. Especially pleasing to Examiners was that most candidates avoided a narrative approach and were able to select specific illuminating episodes to concentrate on Bessy's role, rather than just her character. Such candidates often showed an awareness of the significance of the character as a female representative of the working classes, and as a contributory factor in the development of Margaret. Comparisons were also made with Edith and Fanny Thornton, candidates focusing on Gaskell's portrayal of her fortitude, patience and religious conviction.
- (b) The choice of passage proved to be a helpful one for candidates. Because there was little physical action, it was difficult to lapse into narrative and this assisted candidates in focusing on aspects of presentation, such as Mr Hale's nervousness and Margaret's internal monologue. Wider textual knowledge was often impressively linked too, with most answers showing a clear understanding of the significance of decision to move in the lives of the family. Some weaker answers dealt with the passage very briefly before narrating the fortunes of the family in Milton Northern.

Question 5Katherine Mansfield: *The Garden Party and Other Stories*

- (a) Candidates referred to a wide range of stories in answer to this question, 'Prelude', 'Bliss', 'Millie' and 'Frau Brechenmacher' being particularly favoured choices. The most successful candidates were able to comment on how Mansfield allows characters to reveal themselves through their thoughts and feelings, and how she uses imagery and symbolism. Some were able to point out that the stories reveal Mansfield's attitude to social divisions and her views on the position of women. Textual knowledge was nearly always very good, with few answers dependent on paraphrase.
- (b) Many candidates had a good knowledge of Laura's character as it is presented in the passage and at other key points in the story. Candidates approached the concept of the internal and external worlds of the character by comparing the presentation of Laura's internal thoughts with her external behaviour towards the workmen, an approach which was usually very successful. Many candidates showed good understanding of the social background against which these stories were written. Some saw Laura negotiating a class position with the workmen, while others suggested she is assuming the manners of being grown-up, to which the workmen respond tactfully and sympathetically. Again, either interpretation worked effectively.

Question 6Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) Most candidates had no difficulty in seeing Karanja as a traitor, but many candidates were more successful in arguing for a more balanced view of his role in the novel. Some of the most impressive answers were those in which candidates discussed the different roles of Karanja, for example, betrayer, rejected lover, servant of the white man and, ultimately, failure. Such essays recognised how Karanja the guitar-playing, witty, debater turns into a lonely, cruel, adulterer once he becomes the Europeans' servant. Some candidates noted that Karanja still has rain falling on him as he goes into exile, so that Ngugi seems to have pity on him despite his failings.
- (b) Though less confident candidates tended to paraphrase the passage, giving a general account of the characters concerned, there were many good answers which concentrated in detail on the language of the passage. There was a good sense of the context in which the passage was framed and a sympathetic commentary on the characters. Those candidates who noted that the reader at this point knows that Gikonyo's and Mumbi's marriage is in difficulty were particularly successful in contextualising the extract. There were several candidates, however, who misplaced the passage, assuming it takes place after Gikonyo's discovery of Mumbi's child by Karanja. Such a misunderstanding led these answers seriously astray. Many candidates appreciated the linguistic details of the passage and its tone of sensuality and sexuality. More confident candidates analysed the effects carefully, while less confident candidates asserted that 'the language shows that Gikonyo is excited'.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

- (a)(b) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) Candidates often showed a good knowledge of the play in answering this question, noting that illness and disease are widely-used metaphors within the text. Some candidates found it difficult to go beyond illness as a metaphor for ambition, but more confident candidates drew together a number of examples of the imagery, looking at the corruption of the state of Scotland and the imagery surrounding the King of England.
- (b) Most candidates were aware of the context of this scene, as the forces opposed to Macbeth gather and the movement towards his end accelerates. Some candidates commented on the fact that this acceleration is voiced by relatively minor characters, and that their references to Siward, Donalbain, Malcolm, Macduff and 'the English pow'r' demonstrates the breadth of the movement against Macbeth. Others noted the references to Macbeth's behaviour, compared with what the audience has already seen. The most successful candidates were those who focused very clearly on the detail, noting, for example, the continuation of the play's clothing imagery.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) This question provided a real opportunity for candidates to develop their personal responses to character. Many candidates took this opportunity, showing good textual knowledge and presenting a thoughtful and balanced consideration of Amanda with helpful use of supporting evidence. Candidates were able to demonstrate what there is to 'laugh at' in Amanda's character, and many further suggested that she could have a frustrating and irritating effect on an audience, but thoughtful and detailed examinations of her role were also able to develop a consideration of the ways in which Williams attracts sympathy towards her character, recognising her struggles for the family, but also Williams' use of sound and lighting at key moments.
- (b) There were some very lively responses to the extract from Scene 3, and a pleasing number of candidates paid careful attention to the stage directions as well as the dialogue, showing a developed understanding of the drama of the piece. While there were some examples of paraphrase, many candidates looked in real detail at the extract, noting the ways in which Williams indicates Tom's growing anger and frustration through the use of dialogue broken by pauses, emphasis through punctuation and italics, increasing sarcasm, lurid fantasy and personal insult. Many candidates commented effectively on the final long stage direction and the significance of the 'shattering glass'.